

Protecting Wisconsin Consumers for 75 Years

“Gas-saving” products

When gas prices go up, it seems like the number of ads for gas-saving products does, too. Although there are practical steps you can take to increase your gas mileage, be on the lookout for gas-saving claims for automotive devices or oil and gas additives. Even for the few gas-saving products that have been found to work, the savings are small.

Gas-saving claims

When gas prices climb, products that claim they will save gas might look good. But it is a smart idea to be skeptical of any gas-saving claims for automotive devices or oil and gas additives.

Here are some examples of claims you might see:

“Improves fuel economy by 20 percent.” Ads typically tout savings from 12 to 25 percent. However, despite evaluating or testing more than 100 alleged gas-saving devices, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not found any product that significantly improves gas mileage. In fact, some “gas-saving” products may damage a car’s engine or substantially increase exhaust emissions.

“After installing this product, my car gets an extra 4 miles per gallon.” Ads may feature glowing testimonials from satisfied customers, but few people have the ability or the equipment to test for precise changes in gas mileage after installing a product that claims to save gas. Many variables affect fuel consumption, including, traffic, road and weather conditions, and the car’s condition.

For example, a letter to a company praised its “gas-saving” product. But the product was installed at the same time the car owner got a complete engine tune-up – a fact not mentioned in the letter. The bump in gas mileage attributed to the product may well have been the result of the tune-up.

“It is approved by the federal government.” No government agency endorses gas-saving products for cars. The most an ad could claim is that the EPA has reached certain conclusions about possible gas savings by testing the product or by evaluating the manufacturer’s own test data.

If the seller claims that its product has been evaluated by EPA, ask

for a copy of the EPA report, or check epa.gov for information.

The effect on your car

While EPA evaluates or tests some products to determine whether they will significantly improve or hurt fuel economy, the agency does not conduct durability tests: it cannot say what effect the products will have on a vehicle over time. It is possible that some products may harm the car or negatively affect its performance. In fact, the emission control systems in today’s cars are very sophisticated and complex with features that alert drivers to problems. Retrofit products may have a negative effect on these systems.

Real money-saving steps

You can take many free or low-cost steps to save on gas, including, buying only the octane level you need, watching your speed, properly maintaining the vehicle, and checking tire pressure.

At the pump

Check your owner’s manual for the most effective octane level for your car. For most cars, the recommended gasoline is regular octane. In most cases, using a

higher octane gas than the manufacturer recommends offers no benefit – and costs you at the pump.

Some cars do require premium fuel, so before you fill up, check your owner's manual to find out if the higher priced gas is required or just recommended.

Shop around. Specialized phone apps and websites can help you find the cheapest gas prices in your area. Also, many gas stations advertise regular weekly specials at their locations.

Charge it. Consider a credit card that offers cash back for gas purchases. Some offer two to five percent rebates, but it is wise to read the fine print. Fees, charges, interest rates, and benefits can vary among credit card issuers.

On the road

Start driving as soon as the engine is started. Modern engines do not need much time to warm up. The engine actually warms up more quickly once the car is operating, and will stay warm after stopping.

Do not speed. Gas mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 60 miles per hour (mph). According to the fuel-economy.gov, each 5 mph you drive over 60 mph is like paying an additional 24 cents per gallon for gas.

Avoid unnecessary idling. It wastes fuel, costs you money, and pollutes the air. Turn off the engine if you anticipate a wait.

Use overdrive gears and cruise control when appropriate. They improve fuel economy when you are driving on the highway.

Minimize the need to brake by anticipating traffic conditions. Be alert for slow-downs and red lights. Anticipate bends and turns on familiar roads. Letting up on the gas often eliminates the need for braking.

Avoid jackrabbit starts and stops. Avoiding these can increase your mpg and prolong the life of your brakes.

Use the air conditioner only when you absolutely need it. Air conditioning drastically reduces fuel economy. Most air conditioners have an “economy” setting that allows the circulation of unchilled air.

Many also have a “maximum” or “recirculation” setting that reduces the amount of hot outside air that must be chilled. Both settings can reduce the air conditioning load – and save gas.

Combine errands. Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as one trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm.

Remove excess weight from the trunk. An extra 100 pounds in the trunk can reduce a typical car's fuel economy by up to two percent.

Avoid packing items on top of your car. A loaded roof rack or carrier creates wind resistance and can decrease fuel economy by five percent.

At the garage

Keep your engine tuned. Tuning your engine according to your owner's manual can increase gas mileage by an average of four percent.

Keep your tires properly inflated and aligned. It can increase gas mileage up to three percent, improve handling, and prolong the life of your tires. Check your owner's manual or the door jamb for the proper level of inflation (not the tire itself, which shows the maximum tire inflation pressure); check the tire pressure when the tires are cold, because internal pressure increases when the car has been on the road for a while and the tires heat up.

Change your oil. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), you can improve your gas mileage by using the manufacturer's recommended grade of motor oil.

Motor oil that says “Energy conserving” or the performance symbol of the American Petroleum Institute contains friction-reducing additives that can improve fuel economy.

If you are in the market for a car, you also might consider getting one that is fuel-efficient. In fact, deciding which vehicle to buy may be the most important fuel economy choice you make.

The difference between a car that gets 20 MPG (miles per gallon) and one that gets 30 MPG amounts of \$4,375 over 5 years,

assuming as costs \$3.50 per gallon and you drive 15,000 miles a year.

Visit fuelconomy.gov for gas mileage estimates and other information for cars dating from 1985.

Devices tested by EPA

In the past, EPA tested many types of “gas-saving” products as part of its Voluntary Aftermarket Retrofit Device Evaluation Program. Most devices tested had little to no effect on fuel economy or exhaust emissions; some even had a negative effect.

For the specific products’ test results, visit EPA’s website, epa.gov.

EPA testing also has received no credible data showing a positive effect on fuel economy from:

- devices that turn water into fuel
- fuel line devices
- mixture enhancers

What now

If you are not satisfied with a product that claims to save gas, contact the manufacturer and ask for a refund. Most companies offer money-back guarantees. Contact the company, even if the guarantee period has expired.

If you are not satisfied with the company’s response, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

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(Information taken from FTC fact sheets “Gas-Saving Products” and “Saving Money on Gas”)

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